

SUBUNITS 2A and 2B, UPPER DECEPTION CREEK

1. **Background** These subunits provide very important habitat for moose, brown and black bear, furbearers, and small game. They are particularly important to moose because the various habitats found there support high concentrations of moose in the summer, fall, and early winter seasons; extensive (high density) breeding activities followed by post-breeding bull aggregations (concentrations) occur in the timbered and forage production areas; calving occurs in much of the subunit.

The Willow Creek Sled Trail goes through subunits 2A and 2B, shown on USGS maps as the Sled Road Trail. This is a 15.5 mile trail from Houston at about mile 58.4 on the Parks Highway to various points on the Hatcher Pass Road, including mile 31.3. Historically the trail was a winter supply route from Knik to War Baby and Lucky Shot Mines on Craigie Creek in the Talkeetna Mountains and to various mining claims along Willow Creek. Today the trail is a winter dog mushing trail that is also used by off-road vehicles and snow machines. This trail has a 50-foot wide right-of-way.

In addition, the "Nike Site" trail goes through subunit 2A, from Hatcher Pass Road to Bullion Mountain. The first section (less than a mile) goes through private property (outside the unit). Bullion Mountain offers views of Anchorage and Denali and presently is used primarily as a destination for snowmachines. This trail has a 50-foot wide right-of-way.

Lloyd's Trapline and Dogmushing Trail and the Bald Mountain trail also go through subunit 2A. Lloyd's trail runs from the Parks Highway just south of Nancy Lake to a small lake about 1½ miles south of Mile 35.5 of the Hatcher Pass Road (13.5 miles from the Parks Highway). It is a winter trail used primarily by local dog mushers. The Bald Mountain trail starts at the Hatcher Pass Road where the Willow Creek Sled Trail does and goes uphill to timber line.

Local and urban residents of Southcentral Alaska use these trails for hunting, trapping, and exploring. The semi-remoteness and semi-wild, rugged character of the subunit is appropriate for these dispersed recreational activities. The subunit's importance as wildlife habitat and as a dispersed recreation area will increase in the future as land use activities in adjacent areas further decrease the availability of such opportunities.

These subunits are alpine tundra in the higher elevations, a mixture of short stands of open white spruce forest and closed black spruce forest at mid elevations, with strips of closed deciduous forest at lower elevations along the western and southern edges. The open forest areas have alder, willow, or bluejoint reedgrass - common fireweed dominated understories and are considered by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) to have moderate grazing potential. In addition, there are about six sections that SCS rates as high grazing potential. This includes the subalpine zone on Bald Mountain and the southeast facing slopes of Bullion Mountain. The vegetation in these areas is a mosaic of grassland and willow or alder scrub; the willow scrub appears to be more abundant here than in similar areas north of Willow Creek. The SCS analysis is based on photo interpretation without ground truthing within the management unit.

These subunits are generally hilly with steep slopes. Most valleys, lower side slopes and depressions are boggy. Meadows are characterized by tussocks in various stages of development with standing or running water underneath.

Subunit 2B is part of the watershed draining south to Bench Lake and the Little Susitna River. Bench Lake is one of the sources that Houston is considering for its water supply.

Technical Report Number 4 of the New Capital Site Planning Commission, published in 1982, states that the "... entire Deception Creek Gorge and the lands north and east of the Creek are identified as undevelopable. Although there are small pockets of developable land within this general area, steep slopes make it infeasible to provide road access, and adverse climatic conditions produced by the higher elevations make this area unsuitable for housing. Moreover, construction on the slopes draining down to Deception Creek could cause erosion which would affect salmon spawning in Deception Creek." The capital site plan allocated this unit as reserved use land, to be set aside for permanent habitat protection and recreation use. The first New Capital Site Planning Commission, in *Our New Capital City, A Report to the People of Alaska*, published in 1978, stated, "There will be no development in areas which could be harmful to fish in Deception Creek and elsewhere. Major open spaces will be maintained to accommodate the habitat of animals native to the area."

2. **Primary Uses**

Secondary Uses

2A Wildlife Habitat
2B Wildlife Habitat, Watershed

2A and 2B: Dispersed recreation

3. **Classification**

Subunit 2A: Wildlife Habitat
Subunit 2B: Water Resources Land and Wildlife Habitat except T18N, R3W, section 1, which is Resource Management.

Section 1 is classified Resource Management because it is contiguous to the capital site core development area; was identified as development reserve lands by the Capital Site Planning Commission; and is part of the borough interest lands. It also has important wildlife values. More information is needed in order to make a long range decision on the most appropriate primary use(s) of this section.

4. **Management Intent** Subunit 2 will be managed primarily for wildlife habitat and maintenance of its semi-wilderness character. In addition, subunit 2B will also be managed for its watershed values. Dispersed recreation is a secondary use in both subunits. No year-round roads will be allowed except as provided in Transportation Guideline number 3a in Chapter II. Mining is allowed only under lease except within Deception Creek and its tributaries which is closed to locatable mineral entry. Other leases are allowed only if they are compatible with this management intent, will not significantly adversely affect wildlife or its habitat, and will not require a permanent, year-round road.

5. Guidelines

- a. **Mineral Closure** Deception Creek and its tributaries as shown on the Subsurface designations map in Chapter II will remain closed to new locatable mineral entry.
- b. **Trails** The Willow Creek sled trail, the "Nike Site" trail, and Lloyd's Trapline and Dogmushing trail are subject to a 50-foot vegetated buffer on either side of center line. See the Transportation Section for activities allowed within this buffer.
- c. **"Nike Site" Trail** Take necessary steps to ensure continued public access via this trail. Research the trail history to determine whether there is existing public easement and, if so, assert it (RS2477). If there is no existing easement, either an easement through private property should be acquired or the beginning of the trail rerouted, perhaps through section 2 in subunit 2A.
- d. **Timber Harvest** No timber harvest will be allowed in these subunits except when specifically requested and approved by the ADF&G regional office with the following exception. ADF&G has three years from the adoption of this plan to identify where and under what conditions timber may be harvested below the 1000 foot contour level in section 1, T18N, R3W, S.M., and sections 3-6 and 9, T18N, R2W, S.M. If no report is completed within the three years, timber harvest will be allowed in these sections (below 1000 feet) subject to the guidelines for subunit 3 and the unitwide guidelines. In the preparation of this report, the Division of Forestry should be consulted and field work should be done jointly where possible.

The report must address the following:

- (1) How many moose use this area in winter and how many moose use it in summer; what do they eat?
 - (2) What percentage of each category of these moose migrate?
 - (3) What percentage of each category of these moose are resident?
 - (4) What are the moose eating in the area now (what brings them here)?
 - (5) Locations within this area, if any, where the moose congregate (i.e. high use areas) and where disturbance of vegetation would be particularly harmful to the moose.
 - (6) If the study concludes that either no timber harvest should occur or that it should be very limited, the reasons for this conclusion should be specific as to why logging cannot be done in a manner that results in a moose population of equal size and health to that present before logging.
- e. **Roads** See Transportation guideline number 3a.

- f. **Grazing** Grazing is not allowed in subunits 2A or 2B. When SCS acquires additional range data, and if there is a request for a grazing authorization in subunits 2A or 2B; the planning team will reevaluate the grazing prohibition for these subunits. Grazing will not be allowed in brown bear concentration areas. During this period, ADF&G will collect further data on the extent of brown and black bear use of these subunits to the extent possible and that funding is available.